



**WESTERN  
GOVERNORS'**  
ASSOCIATION



# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT



# Dear Friends and Colleagues,

An important component of any successful organization is its ability to effectively carry out its mission while undergoing a leadership change. Over the past year, WGA has continued its long history of serving Western Governors through bipartisan policy development on critical issues facing western states and territories. All this despite a change in leadership mid-year, due to the retirement of Jim Ogsbury following his decade of outstanding service to WGA as Executive Director. The smoothness of the transition is a testament to the unwavering support from our Western Governors who continue to set aside partisan politics to collectively address shared regional challenges, as well as the strong foundation Jim and his predecessors have established over WGA's nearly forty years as an organization.

During my almost six months as Executive Director, I've been greatly inspired by the collaboration between our Governors and the broad range of policies they continue to develop together. In our modern age of hyper-partisanship, this collaboration is unique, and continues to serve as a stark reminder that bipartisanship is not just a relic of the past. Western Governors and their staffs truly embody this ethos, and the results are undeniable. I have also seen firsthand the enthusiasm and devotion to advancing western priorities displayed by the WGA staff on a daily basis. I consider myself lucky to work alongside such dedicated professionals who work tirelessly in support of the West, and I am grateful for their support during the transition.

Over the past year, Western Governors approved ten policy resolutions outlining their collective policy on



everything from housing, western agriculture, and infrastructure permitting to veterans and missing and murdered indigenous persons, to name a few.

These resolutions are more than just policy statements used to advocate in Washington, D.C., for western priorities, they represent the Governors' willingness to work together to address the most critical issues facing the region – a staple of WGA's core mission.

As part of Colorado Governor Jared Polis' WGA Chair initiative, The Heat Beneath Our Feet, which sought to examine the various market, technology, and policy factors that affect the development and deployment of geothermal technologies, four Western Governors hosted workshops and tours of geothermal facilities

in their respective states. The result is a comprehensive report that generated bipartisan recommendations for accelerating geothermal energy use in the West.

This commitment to cooperation, however, extends far beyond WGA's Chair initiatives. Montana Governor Greg Gianforte hosted this year's Western Prosperity Roundtable, a platform developed by WGA to address capacity challenges and equip western communities for locally-led community and economic development efforts, in Bozeman.

During the two-day meeting, Governor Gianforte led a roundtable discussion with housing experts from across the region to examine the various strategies that western states have deployed to address affordable housing shortages.

Of course, Western Governors also carved out time in their busy schedules to meet with each other and host public policy discussions at WGA's Annual and Winter meetings with senior Administration officials, national thought leaders, and industry experts.

These meetings are the ultimate demonstration of Western Governors' bipartisan philosophy. There are no canned comments or false pretenses. The collegiality and passion displayed by the Governors and their guests at these meetings is genuine, and their discussions lead to concrete actions. There's no better gauge for this than engagement between our Governors and the young adults that comprised this year's Western Governors Leadership Institute delegates, who are selected from each state in WGA's footprint to attend a leadership development forum at our Annual Meeting. After spending just a few days with the Governors and their guests, these promising young adults said their faith in America's political system and their excitement to engage was renewed.

Western Governors' ability to set their differences aside and have open, honest conversations about the most effective ways to address the challenges facing the West is what this Association is all about, and that message is being heard loud and clear in Washington D.C.

This year's WGA-Cabinet breakfast in Washington was attended by twelve Western Governors and four cabinet secretaries, including

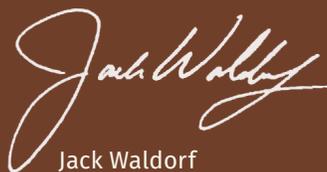
Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Marcia Fudge, and Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough. In meetings with several White House and federal agency officials where a myriad of western priorities were discussed, even challenging issues like state and federal efforts to conserve greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat in western states were on the table.

This enthusiasm to work with WGA is a testament to Western Governors' ability to rise above politics in service to their constituents. As Jim was fond of saying, "Western Governors are the last adults standing in American politics."

Watching how our Western Governors have worked together over the past few months, I fully agree with this sentiment. I am grateful for their visionary leadership. They are an example the nation can learn from in of today's political landscape.

As we close out another successful year, I want to thank Governor Polis for his outstanding leadership and stewardship as Chair, and I look forward working with our incoming Chair, Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon, as he takes the gavel to usher in another productive year here at WGA.

Until next time!



Jack Waldorf  
WGA Executive Director

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# HEAT BENEATH OUR FEET INITIATIVE

Colorado Governor Jared Polis, Chair of the Western Governors' Association, launched The Heat Beneath Our Feet initiative in 2022 to examine opportunities for and barriers to the accelerated development and deployment of geothermal energy technologies. The potential of geothermal energy in the West is vast and offers significant advantages and benefits in efforts to expand renewable energy. Advances in technology and increased interest in developing domestic sources of reliable, clean energy have brought greater attention to the energy potential of the heat beneath our feet.

The initiative examined the various market, technology, and policy factors that affect the development of geothermal resources.

Through a rigorous stakeholder process that included four workshops, six tours, a public survey, and a webinar series, the Heat Beneath Our Feet initiative generated recommendations for increasing the development and deployment of geothermal energy in the West, including:

- **Improve resource assessment and data collection:** Increasing federal funding for resource assessments,

coordinating efforts to target areas with the greatest potential, improving the federal repository of data relevant to geothermal development, and leveraging data from the oil and gas industry will increase understanding of subsurface resources and foster development.

- **Mitigate risk in drilling and exploration:** Risk and uncertainty contribute to extremely high up-front costs for geothermal development. Those costs can be abated by continuing federal investment to reduce uncertainty in geothermal exploration, exploring models to

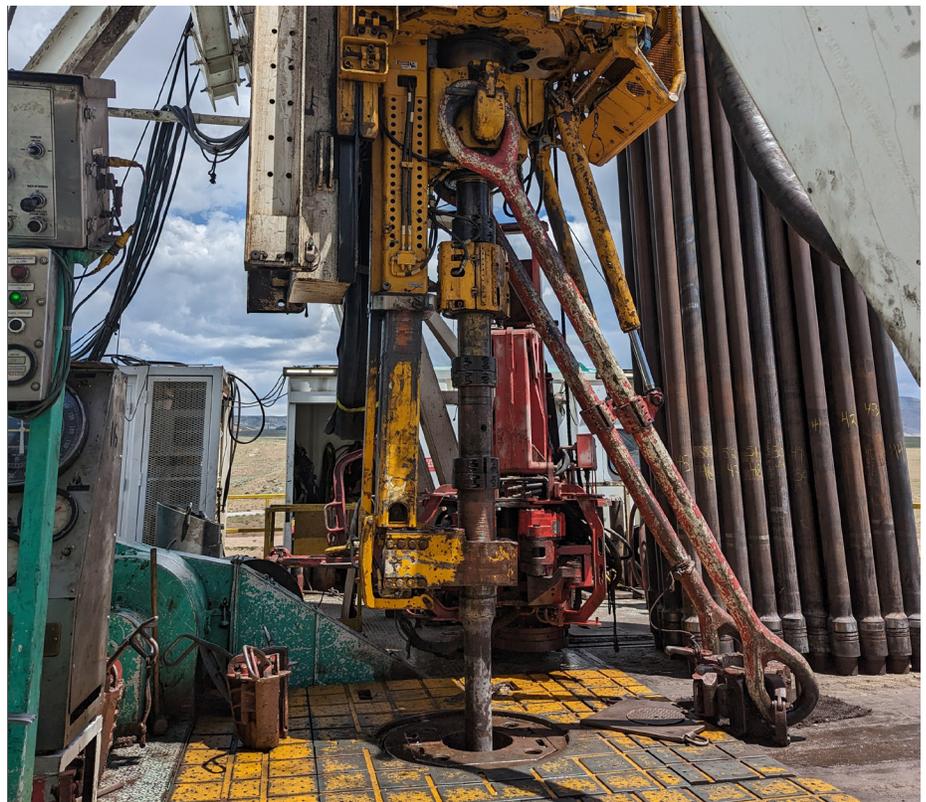


help developers secure financing for exploratory drilling and mitigate drilling risk, and extending existing tax incentives for the oil and gas industry to geothermal development.

- Optimize permitting and improve regulatory certainty:** Permitting timelines can also be prohibitive for geothermal development. Lengthy delays can be mitigated by providing tools and resources to help stakeholders navigate the geothermal development process, increasing agency capacity for leasing and permitting, developing streamlined processes and categorical exclusions for geothermal leasing on par with other energy categories, expanding oil and gas exploration regulatory efficiencies to geothermal development, and collaborating with tribes and communities prior to and during project development. Understanding the effects of new technologies is also critical, so research on the water usage of Enhanced Geothermal Systems and other issues of social and environmental concern should be funded.
- Expand funding opportunities:** U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) funding for demonstration projects and the Geothermal Technologies Office should be increased. Investment in energy transition communities should be encouraged.
- Implement incentives for consumer adoption:** Expedite the deployment of tax incentives, rebates, and end-user applications to spur the adoption of geothermal heating and cooling.
- Develop workforce and contractor ecosystem:** Geothermal energy can generate good jobs and create opportunities for workers and communities affected by the energy transition. Workforce development in the geothermal industry should be supported, including through the development of training and certification programs.



Colorado Governor Jared Polis discusses the potential for geothermal energy with Deputy Secretary of Energy David Turk at WGA's 2023 Annual Meeting in Boulder, Colorado.



The drill at Utah FORGE, where they are currently in the process of drilling a 10,000-foot-deep geothermal well to test Enhanced Geothermal Systems.

- Increase awareness and education to develop geothermal markets:** Develop guidance for policymakers, regulators, and utilities to conduct cost-benefit analyses of geothermal energy.

The Heat Beneath Our Feet initiative report is a resource for policymakers

and stakeholders. Initiative recommendations can assist in accelerating the development and deployment of geothermal technologies, which can play a significant role in meeting the West's energy needs for a clean and sustainable future.





# WORKING LANDS ROUNDTABLE

The Working Lands Roundtable is a platform for WGA's work on natural resource policy, focusing on cross-boundary and multi-disciplinary resource management issues in the West. The Roundtable draws on the expertise of a wide range of resource management, landowner, and conservation professionals to explore strategies that enhance the resiliency of western working landscapes and the communities they support.



## WILDFIRE AND DISASTER ASSISTANCE

With extreme weather affecting nearly every state and territory in the region, Western Governors worked tirelessly with their federal partners to ensure communities have the resources they need to protect themselves, their critical infrastructure, and the surrounding environment from the growing threat of natural disasters.

Throughout the year, Western Governors and WGA's policy team engaged with congressional committees and several agencies – including the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) – to determine the most effective strategies to fund fire mitigation projects and improve disaster recovery efforts.

“Governors need maximum flexibility to respond to disaster and emergency circumstances that may evolve quickly over the course of a disaster through the initiation of recovery,” WGA's Disaster Preparedness and Response resolution states. “The lack of speed, certainty, and consistency in the appropriation of federal disaster funding are a hindrance



**Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack announced the launch of a new \$1 billion Community Wildfire Defense Grant program WGA's 2022 Annual Meeting in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.**

to coordinated recovery efforts and effective utilization of public funds.”

These advocacy efforts resulted in significant funding adjustments for several key disaster relief programs.

At WGA's 2022 Annual Meeting, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack announced the launch of a new \$1 billion Community Wildfire Defense Grant program.

The five-year competitive program, funded by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), is designed to assist at-risk communities, including tribal communities, non-profit organizations, state forestry agencies, and Alaska Native corporations with planning for and mitigating wildfire risks.

As part of the fiscal year 2023 (FY23) Consolidated Appropriations Act,



U.S. Forest Service (USFS) State and Private Forestry received \$97 million for Cooperative Fire Assistance, including State Fire Assistance and Volunteer Fire Assistance programs.

### State Disaster Assistance

The FY23 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) amended the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act to include assistance to states and territories in collecting and presenting materials in a disaster declaration to help demonstrate “severe localized impacts” for a specific incident. The NDAA also requires FEMA to review the criteria the agency uses to evaluate a Governor’s request for a disaster declaration.

The FY23 Consolidated Appropriations Act also directed FEMA to consult with

states on the policy of considering population size when determining the public assistance criteria.

### Wildfire Workforce

To meet the growing demand for robust wildland firefighter and restoration workforces, both the USDA and DOI were directed by the FY23 Consolidated Appropriations Act to take actions that attract staff, including a comprehensive study on long-term health effects that wildland firefighters experience and proposed legislative actions that would help to mitigate occupational health risks.

### Fire Affected Fauna

DOI was directed to provide \$4.5 million to the Joint Fire Science Program, which USFS will match,

for a total of \$9 million. With the additional funding, the Joint Fire Science Program was encouraged to enhance its understanding of how invasive species affect fuels, fire behavior, and fire regimes, as well as how indigenous practices may be beneficial to wildfire prevention, response, and resilience.

### Other Advocacy

Western Governors expressed appreciation for HUD’s commitment to improving the Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) Program and included recommendations to enhance the program’s funding formula to better support disaster recovery, preparedness, and hazard mitigation across the West.



## FOREST AND RANGELAND MANAGEMENT

Forest and rangeland management is critical to the success of western communities and their surrounding environments. Western Governors’ continued advocacy on behalf of these communities helped develop new partnerships and secure historic levels of funding for land management projects.

In June of 2022, Idaho Governor Brad Little completed his WGA Chair initiative, Working Lands, Working Communities. The workshops and discussions WGA hosted as part of this initiative led to the adoption of WGA’s policy resolution, Working Lands, Working Communities, that expressed the need for improved intergovernmental collaboration to increase local capacity and expand cross-boundary management projects.

“Federal, state, local, and tribal land managers should work to support effective collaboration on federal projects and all-lands initiatives,” the resolution states. “These agencies



From left, Laura McCarthy, New Mexico State Forester; Randy Moore, Chief, U.S. Forest Service; and Homer Wilkes, Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment at the USDA, spoke with the Governors at WGA’s 2022 Annual Meeting in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, about the need to increase local capacity for post-fire restoration.



should strive to find new ways to collaborate on forest and rangeland management projects, as well as to explore ways to improve state-federal coordination on existing management projects.”

These priorities were outlined in regular communications with the White House, Congress, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and USFS, which led to many of those issues being directly addressed in the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and the FY23 Consolidated Appropriations Act.

### Cross-boundary Management

The IRA included \$2 billion for hazardous fuel reduction and vegetation management.

Another \$400 million was included within the IRA for grants and cost-

sharing agreements to carry out climate mitigation and forest resilience projects.

\$50 million was allocated for states to pay private forest owners to manage their land and maximize carbon sequestration benefits.

\$150 million was allotted for improving the speed of environmental reviews, including hiring and training staff, conducting programmatic environmental reviews, contracting National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) services, and developing data management.

The FY23 Consolidated Appropriations Act directed DOI to develop a legislative proposal that would provide Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) to the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) so that

it could aid in the environmental stewardship of national wildlife refuges and adjacent non-federal lands.

The IRA provided the Secretary of Agriculture with \$100 million to support Wood Innovation Grants under the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act.

The FY23 Consolidated Appropriations Act directed the Administration to promote innovation in communities that have been adversely affected by changes in the timber and pulp marketplaces and to support projects that help these communities develop related industries, including the commercialization of new forest products using low-grade wood.



## SPECIES CONSERVATION

Biodiversity is key to maintaining the West’s complex ecosystems amid extreme weather events and widespread development. Western Governors’ work to balance these competing interests highlights their willingness to work together on a fiercely bipartisan basis to develop solutions that work for everyone.

Much of the Governors’ work on species conservation this year was conducted via WGA’s Task Force on Collaborative Conservation through a February 2022 joint agreement with DOI and USDA to enhance collaboration across federal, state, and local jurisdictions.

“This Task Force will be an important vehicle for enhancing cooperation between the Departments of Agriculture and Interior and our western partners on the conservation challenges impacting the region, as well as coordinating critical funding,” the Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, said at the time of the signing.



**Colorado Governor Jared Polis, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, and Idaho Governor Brad Little posing with the signed agreement to collaborate through the Task Force on Collaborative Conservation.**

This year, the Task Force hosted virtual and in-person workgroups with USDA, BLM, FWS, the U.S. Geological Survey, and western states to discuss

management issues and allow for states to make specific recommendations for resources, processes, and regulations to improve management.



## INVASIVE SPECIES

Successfully stopping the spread of invasive species requires extreme vigilance and a high level of intergovernmental coordination. Western Governors worked diligently this year to ensure mechanisms are in place to streamline the process of sharing information and resources.

Following novel outbreaks of quagga and zebra mussels in Colorado and Wyoming, Western Governors sprang into action and worked together to ensure the outbreaks were effectively contained.

These experiences prompted Western Governors to reiterate the importance of Congress enacting the policies outlined in WGA's policy resolution, Biosecurity and Invasive Species Management, which calls for federal agencies to act as full partners in invasive species containment efforts – especially as it related to containing invasive species within lands and waters under federal jurisdiction.

“The threats that invasive species pose to western landscapes and communities are serious and should be met with a sophisticated and coordinated response commensurate with the level of their impacts,” the resolution reads. “When possible,



**In September, Colorado Parks and Wildlife identified a single adult zebra mussel at Highline Lake, the first time the invasive species was recorded in state history.**

federal agencies should look for collaborative projects and funding opportunities that multiply state resources and support jurisdiction-led biosecurity and invasive species management projects.”

Many of these recommendations were adopted as part of the FY23 NDAA, which

increased the membership and resources provided by the federal Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force.

In the FY23 NDAA, Congress included the Directors of the National Park Service, BLM, and the Commissioner of Reclamation as members of the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force, which will enhance coordination and make additional resources available for federal management of aquatic invasive species.

Task Force members will also be empowered to provide technical assistance to state, local, and tribal agencies as well as other organizations engaged in aquatic invasive species management and the inspection and decontamination of watercraft.



## WATER

Drought has become an all-encompassing issue in the West. As the authority for how water is managed and allocated within their respective states, Western Governors took a leading role in discussions about the West's water future.

To address the wide-ranging effects of drought, Western Governors leveraged WGA's policy resolution, Water Resource Management in the West, to advocate

in Congress for additional resources, including funding for voluntary water conservation programs, better water forecasting, and improved mechanisms for intergovernmental coordination.

The Governors' continued advocacy was rewarded with significant increases in funding for existing water management programs, as well as additional resources to launch

new projects that are designed to ramp up water conservation efforts.

### Drought Mitigation

The IRA allocated \$4 billion to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) to provide grants for voluntary water conservation programs, including voluntary reduction in use and diversion agreements, as well as ecosystem and habitat restoration projects.





A panel of experts from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, USDA, and DOI spoke with the Governors about the importance of regional water planning and working together to solve the region's water woes.

### Weather and Climate Forecasting

The IRA appropriated \$150 million through FY26 for NOAA to accelerate advances in research and observation systems, as well as modeling and forecasting programs, and the process for disseminating that information to the public.

NOAA was granted another \$50 million for competitive grants to research the effects of climate on marine species and coastal habitats.

The FY23 Consolidated Appropriations Act included \$16.7 million for the Snow Survey and Water Forecasting Program, an increase of \$7.25 million compared to the FY22 enacted level, and a \$7 million increase for the Natural Resources Conservation Service Snow Telemetry Network.

### Western Water Cooperative Committee

The FY23 NDAA established a Western Water Cooperative Committee, comprised of representatives from the offices of the Governor and Attorney General in each western state. Although the Committee will only act in an advisory role, its mission is to ensure that flood control projects overseen by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) avoid or minimize conflicts with state water rights and water laws.

### Water Infrastructure

The FY23 Consolidated Appropriations



During the WGA 2023 Annual Meeting, Richard Spinrad, Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and Everette Joseph, Director of the National Center for Atmospheric Research, discussed how predictive modeling can be used to provide critical information to water managers, emergency responders, and other decision makers.

Act provided up to \$37.5 million to USDA's Rural Utilities Service (RUS) for technical assistance and training programs for rural water and waste systems.

Another \$70 million was provided for grants to update water and waste disposal systems in Native American communities, including Native Alaskans, and the Colonias.

USACE's Investigation account, which establishes a process by which the Corps of Engineers can help a community solve a water resource problem, was allocated an additional \$11 million to provide planning assistance to the states.

USACE was also encouraged to continue assisting vulnerable coastal communities and prioritize planning-level technical assistance to federally recognized tribal communities along

the coast that are actively relocating homes and other critical infrastructure to mitigate the effects of extreme weather events.

The FY23 NDAA appropriated \$30 million to provide states with technical assistance for water projects and authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to waive the cost of such assistance to economically disadvantaged communities.

It also included \$200 million for each of the next four years for grants under the Clean Water Act's nonpoint source management programs. Commonly known as the "319 Grant Program," these funds are disseminated through state-run programs for technical assistance and financial assistance, education, training, technology transfer, demonstration projects, and monitoring.



## ENERGY AND MINING

Western Governors have always played a critical role in managing the nation’s power generation and mineral development. That role has become increasingly important as the nation seeks to broaden its energy portfolio in hopes of reducing emissions.

In communication with Congress and DOI, Western Governors leaned on the bipartisan strategies outlined in WGA policy resolutions, including Energy in the West, National Minerals Policy, and Cleaning Up Abandoned Hardrock Mines in the West, to advocate for reduced permitting timelines, promote carbon capture technology, and secure funding for the plugging of abandoned hardrock mines.

“Western energy production is indispensable to meeting national energy demands,” WGA’s policy resolution, Energy in the West, reads. “Because of this, the West is in a strong position to lead the development of energy systems that make the best use of land and resources and balance technical, economic, environmental and cultural considerations.”

### Good Samaritan Legislation



Jim Ogsbury

WGA’s former Executive Director, Jim Ogsbury, testified before the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works regarding the Good Samaritan

Remediation of Abandoned Hardrock Mines Act.

“The Good Samaritan Remediation of Abandoned Hardrock Mines Act would establish a Good Samaritan pilot program of a type that Western Governors explicitly call for in Policy Resolution 2021-09, providing a tool to protect communities, economies,



Colorado Governor Jared Polis and Utah Governor Spencer Cox toured the Utah FORGE facility where they are testing Enhanced Geothermal Systems.

and ecosystems against the ongoing impacts of abandoned mines,” Ogsbury told the Committee. “Such a pilot program can inform and be a precursor to a comprehensive mine remediation program to address the tens of thousands of abandoned mines and their associated hazards.”

### Electricity Transmission

The IRA appropriated \$750 million to DOE for grants to improve the rate of, and shorten the time required for, approval or permitting of transmission projects.

### Emissions Reductions

The IRA also extended the carbon sequestration credit for facilities that begin construction before 2033 and provided an enhanced credit for direct air capture. The threshold for tons of carbon sequestered was also lowered. Additional modifications were made for other technologies to receive base and bonus credits.



“We need to build out transmission like we have never built out transmission ever before,” Deputy Secretary of Energy David Turk told the Governors at WGA’s 2023 Annual Meeting. “Right now we build out about 1% of our transmission in this country. That is woefully inadequate. You need to do at least 2%, if not 3% per year.”





# WESTERN PROSPERITY ROUNDTABLE

The Western Prosperity Roundtable is the platform for WGA's work on policies that advance Western Governors' vision for expanded prosperity throughout the West. The Roundtable assembles community members, policymakers, and experts on interrelated issues affecting opportunity and quality of life to discuss strategies to promote vibrant communities and thriving local economies.



## 2023 WESTERN PROSPERITY ROUNDTABLE FORUM

As the COVID-19 pandemic untethered workers from physical offices and put a premium on space and outdoor access, rural communities throughout the West experienced significant growth. For many of these communities, the scale and speed of growth has strained infrastructure and capacity.

The 2023 Western Prosperity Roundtable Forum convened experts from around the West to discuss strategies for ensuring sustainable development and improving local resources so these communities can flourish.

Topics included approaches for adopting telemedicine, providing better childcare, increasing the supply of affordable housing, expanding workforce development, building for post-disaster resilience, and accessing and implementing federal funds.

Montana Governor Greg Gianforte, the host of this year's forum, moderated a panel on affordable housing with experts from the Mercatus Center, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, the Washington State Department of Commerce, the Utah Department of Workforce Services, and the Colorado Department of Local Affairs.



Montana Governor Greg Gianforte hosted the 2023 Western Prosperity Roundtable Forum in Bozeman, Montana where he led a roundtable discussion on affordable housing.

During the panel, Governor Gianforte discussed a slate of bills he signed to overhaul housing mandates and zoning regulations, encourage the development of denser housing, and streamline permitting reviews.

"Each and every day I'm focused on opening doors of greater opportunity for Montanans so they can thrive, and prosper, and achieve the American Dream... and owning a home is foundational to the American dream," he told the crowd at the AC Hotel in Bozeman. "I am proud of what we've accomplished

in a very bipartisan way through the efforts we put forward [in the Legislature this year], but there's no question we need to do more."

While housing issues often dominate the conversation on rural development these days, there is an equal need to expand options for childcare, improve access to health care, enhance workforce development, and expand capacity for environmental stewardship in rural areas – all of which were discussed among an all-star slate of panelists representing 12 different western states.



## INFRASTRUCTURE IMPLEMENTATION

The IIJA and IRA provided historic levels of funding to upgrade the nation’s infrastructure. Putting that money to work, and ensuring it’s spent in the areas of most need, were top of mind for Western Governors this year.

Western Governors were in regular contact with the White House and federal agencies as they worked to enact rules for distributing the funding allocated under the IIJA and IRA.

During WGA’s 2022 Winter Meeting in Phoenix, Arizona, Western Governors hosted Mitch Landrieu, the senior White House advisor responsible for coordinating the implementation of the IIJA, for a conversation on how states can ensure funding is allocated equitably.

“We are working in communion with tribal communities, mayors, and our states to lift up the United States,” he said. “We want to put our money where our mouth is and get it to the people who can do something about it.”

In order to do so, Western Governors worked closely with several federal agencies – including Region VIII representatives from the USDA, Small Business Administration, Economic Development Administration (EDA), FEMA, and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) during quarterly Western Regional Federal Officials Network (WRFON) meetings – to ensure that the funding regulations are flexible enough to meet the needs of the region’s small rural communities, and that those communities are provided with the technical assistance needed to effectively deploy the funds.

This policy was reflected in the IRA, which created the Rural Development and Agricultural Credit that included \$125 million for capacity building, and financial and technical assistance for underserved farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners.



During WGA’s 2022 Winter Meeting in Phoenix, Arizona, Western Governors hosted Mitch Landrieu, the senior White House advisor responsible for coordinating the implementation of the IIJA, for a conversation on how states can ensure funding is allocated to the areas of most need.



## RURAL DEVELOPMENT

With the strain on rural communities from increased visitation and the historic levels of federal funding flowing down the pipeline, rural development was an important issue for Western Governors this year as they worked with Congress to increase federal funding for small, underserved, rural communities.

In communication with Congress and federal agencies, Western Governors stressed the importance of providing rural towns with technical assistance to help them access federal funding, increase local capacity, and improve community resources – particularly in historically underserved areas. In addition to quarterly WRFON and State-Tribal Liaison Network meetings with state tribal affairs officials, Western



“In far too much of this country, you can only build single-family homes,” Ethan Handelman, Deputy Assistant Secretary for the HUD Office of Multifamily Housing Programs, told the Governors at the 2022 Winter Meeting in Phoenix, Arizona. “We need to find ways to create more options, allow people to choose what they want, and create space for that to occur.”



Governors facilitated a meeting with USDA Rural Development (USDA-RD) State Directors and then USDA Under Secretary Xochitl Torres Small to discuss these issues at the WGA 2022 Winter Meeting in Phoenix.

“Western Governors believe that many federal programs for rural development and distressed communities include unintended barriers for rural individuals and entities that need assistance most,” WGA’s policy resolution, Rural Development reads. “Western Governors urge federal agencies to work with states to thoroughly evaluate program requirements; identify barriers for rural applicants; and revise onerous requirements in a manner that recognizes the limited resources and capacity of rural applicants.”

These sentiments were reflected in the FY23 Consolidated Appropriations Act and the FY23 NDAA.

### Underserved Communities

The Rural Partners Network, which was launched in April and expanded in November 2022, is a whole-of-government effort led by USDA to reimagine the ways in which the federal government partners with and helps provide economic opportunities to rural communities. USDA has placed new field staff in communities to assist them with navigating federal systems and accessing resources. The FY23 Consolidated Appropriations Act provided \$5 million in funding for the program and directed the Network to deliver updates and a report on implementation.

The agreement also noted eligibility constraints in rural and underserved communities for the Community Facilities program and directed USDA to evaluate the program’s income and service area-based eligibility standards and identify ways to improve community access to these grants. In addition,

report language requested that EDA allow funds from other federal programs that are explicitly authorized to be used for any required non-federal match requirements, which would help rural communities that often are unable to meet these requirements get the resources that they urgently need.

The FY23 NDAA directed USACE to increase outreach and provide additional public resources for community engagement with USACE programs, prioritizing economically disadvantaged urban and rural communities and tribes.

### Payments in Lieu of Taxes

The FY23 Consolidated Appropriations Act also fully funded the Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program, which pays local governments to help offset losses in property taxes due to the existence of nontaxable federal lands within their boundaries, at \$515 million.



## HOUSING

Western Governors urged HUD to revise the funding formula for its CDBG-DR program to better support disaster recovery, preparedness, and hazard mitigation across the West.

WGA also submitted policy recommendations to the Senate Committee on Finance that highlighted the need for legislation to lower the threshold of Private Activity Bond financing from 50 to 25 percent and ensure that the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Program works more effectively for underserved communities.

“Housing is foundational to economic development and community vitality,” the letter stated. “The need for a greater diversity of housing options goes beyond the obligation to treat people with dignity, as it is also cost-effective for governments.”





## HEALTH CARE

The stresses of recent years have exacerbated health issues throughout the region – especially in terms of behavioral health. In response, Western Governors have worked tirelessly to expand access to care and improve outcomes.

While the health and safety of their constituents is always a top priority, Western Governors were especially focused this year on addressing the behavioral health issues that affected so many throughout the region.

“Western states face unique challenges in health care that have been compounded by the pandemic, including growing rates of behavioral health conditions, provider shortages in underserved and rural areas, and limited access to broadband, which has limited the availability of telehealth services,” WGA’s policy resolution, Physical and Behavioral Health Care in Western States, reads.

### Workforce

In their correspondence with Congress, Western Governors encouraged the federal government to implement programs that ensure states have

an adequately staffed and diverse workforce that can serve urban, suburban, and rural communities.

“Population growth, aging residents, and challenges involving tribal health care and services for veterans require a renewed focus on developing our nation’s health care workforce,” state the Governors. “The federal government should consider funding new types of personnel, such as community health workers or promotores, in order to further extend the health care team and ensure that patients are connected to resources.”

### Telehealth

Western Governors also advocated for permanent regulatory changes, based on waivers and authorizations granted during the COVID-19 public health crisis, that would allow for more widespread adoption of telehealth services. Many of those key positions were extended through December 2024 in the FY23 Consolidated Appropriations Act. These include:

- Allowing Federally Qualified Health Centers and Regional Health Connectors to serve as distant site

providers for non-behavioral health services;

- Allowing Medicare patients to receive telehealth services authorized in the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services CY2023 Physician Fee Schedule from the home;
- Eliminating geographic restrictions for originating sites for non-behavioral telehealth services;
- Allowing some non-behavioral telehealth services to be furnished using audio-only communication;
- Removing the requirements for in-person visits within six months of an initial behavioral telehealth service and annual in-person visits; and
- Allowing telehealth services to be furnished by a physical therapist, occupational therapist, speech language pathologist, or audiologist.

The FY23 Consolidated Appropriations Act also extended the public health emergency flexibility for health care providers to reduce or waive beneficiary cost sharing, such as coinsurance and deductibles, for telehealth visits paid for by federal health care programs.



## Mental Health

For mental health, the FY23 Consolidated Appropriations Act allocated \$1.1 billion for mental health programs of regional and national significance, a substantial increase of \$466.4 million over last year, including notable allocations to 988 implementation and crisis care services.

The bill also reauthorized and increased funding for several behavioral health programs including:

- \$140 million for Project AWARE, an increase of \$20 million;
- \$15 million for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health, an increase of \$5 million;
- \$20 million to Mental Health Crisis Response Grants; and
- \$28.2 million to the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention.

## Substance Use

The FY23 Consolidated Appropriations Act eliminated the requirement that health care practitioners registered to

dispense controlled substances must apply for a separate waiver (known as the X waiver) through the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) to dispense buprenorphine for opioid use disorder maintenance or detoxification treatment.

Western Governors have advocated for the elimination of the X waiver in WGA's health care resolution. Western Governors urge legislative action to eliminate the unnecessary and burdensome registration requirements for physicians, physician assistants, and nurse practitioners to obtain a waiver from the DEA to treat opioid use disorder with buprenorphine, which would provide health care professionals with additional flexibility to use medication-assisted treatment (MAT) to treat opioid-related substance use disorders.

The FY23 Consolidated Appropriations Act also provided the Substance Abuse Treatment Program with \$111 million for MAT, \$56 million for first responder training, and \$94 million for the Criminal Justice Activities program.

## Public Health Preparedness and Response

Western Governors acknowledge the importance of improving our nation's public health preparedness and response systems. The federal government must examine the lessons learned from COVID-19 and ensure that we have the capability and necessary public health infrastructure investment to effectively confront future public health challenges.

In WGA's health care policy resolution, Governors recommend that the federal government clarify pandemic response roles, build operational capacity within the appropriate health-related agencies, and consider how to expand our international health surveillance and public health threat detection mechanisms.

Congress, in the 2023 Consolidated Appropriations Act, more than doubled funding to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for public health infrastructure and capacity. The legislation contained a myriad of provisions aligned with Governors' policy to clarify the roles and responsibilities of federal agencies, improve coordination, and support state and local public health capacity.





## CONNECTIVITY

Whether it's opportunities for remote work or accessing telehealth, broadband connectivity is essential to modern life. This year, Western Governors worked closely with the federal government to close the digital divide and ensure affordable internet access for western communities.

With billions of dollars in the IIJA and COVID-19 relief legislation, Western Governors worked closely with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to ensure broadband funding was flexible and fairly distributed, especially in rural and underserved areas. "Western Governors request that the FCC, NTIA, USDA, and other federal entities prioritize scalable broadband infrastructure investments that meet communities' increased bandwidth demands into the future," WGA's policy resolution, Broadband Connectivity, reads.

WGA hosted a meeting with states and the FCC and NTIA to discuss challenges with the new National Broadband Data Map and implications for Broadband

Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program funding. In subsequent correspondence, Western Governors emphasized that the BEAD program "represents a historic opportunity to close the digital divide, and mapping is essential to providing states with the correct levels of funding and guaranteeing that no community or household is left behind."

### ReConnect

In line with the Governors' recommendations, The FY23 Consolidated Appropriations Act included more than \$455 million for the expansion of broadband service, including \$348 million for the ReConnect program, under USDA-RD.

Congress also encouraged USDA to lower collateral requirements and some of the matching fund requirements for the ReConnect program, and for EDA to prioritize broadband infrastructure projects in underserved areas, to ensure greater program access for entities involved with rural broadband deployment.

In conjunction with these reforms, the Secretary of Agriculture was directed to eliminate or revise the process of awarding extra points to applicants from states without restrictions on utility service providers and to collaborate with the Rural Electric Division so that utilities and broadband technologies are treated equally in the application process.

### In Other Advocacy

Western Governors expressed appreciation for the FCC's ruling to allow the use of E-Rate Program funding for Wi-Fi or similar access point technologies on school buses.

"Over the past few years, Western Governors have been engaged in, and supportive of, the E-Rate Program, which has been invaluable in supporting broadband deployment to schools and libraries across the West," the Governors' correspondence to the FCC read. "We commend the Commission's attentiveness to this matter."



## CYBERSECURITY

Cybersecurity has become essential to protecting computer networks from malicious actors. Western Governors strongly advocated this year for the federal government to help western communities better protect data, electronic systems, and citizens' private information.

In an increasingly digitized world, cybersecurity is a paramount concern. Many western communities, however, lack the technical expertise to properly protect themselves against sophisticated threats. In response, Western Governors worked with the federal government to develop a centralized source of information and resources.

Western Governors applauded the passage of the Cyber Incident Reporting

for Critical Infrastructure Act and its use of state data, but urged federal agencies and Congress to make federal datasets more widely available to inform the protection of the nation's critical information and infrastructure.

Doing so, they said, would allow the federal government to collaborate with the private sector to mitigate supply chain and national critical infrastructure risks.

Western Governors also urged the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency to clearly define state roles in the Joint Cyber Defense Collaborative and ensure that the State and

Local Cybersecurity Grant Program is administered in a flexible manner.

"Centralized authority, points of contact, and formalized communication pathways are necessary to address increasingly complex threats," WGA's Cybersecurity policy resolution states.

### National Cyber Director

To help coordinate these efforts, in the FY23 Consolidated Appropriations Act, Congress provided the first-ever annual appropriation for the Office of the National Cyber Director, which the Governors explicitly call for in WGA's Cybersecurity policy resolution. The agreement provides the office \$22 million to coordinate national cybersecurity policy and strategy of the United States.





## DATA

Quality data is an essential component of any modern-day decision-making process. Improving data sharing and ensuring access to federal data sets is critical to the effective allocation of billions of dollars in the IRA and IIJA.

Leaning on the bipartisan recommendations outlined in WGA's policy resolution, Utilizing State Data in Federal Decision Making, Western Governors continued their advocacy to improve intergovernmental data sharing this year.

“Congress and the Executive Branch should support, and work with states toward, the modernization of our nation’s data infrastructure and intergovernmental data-sharing and analysis capabilities,” the resolution reads. “Federal agencies should work with state and local partners to develop uniform data standards, where appropriate, to maximize data quality and facilitate intergovernmental data use, access, sharing, and interoperability.”

Throughout the year, Western Governors regularly stressed the need

for federal agencies to use the more granular data collected at the state level to help inform federal decisions and to combine those datasets into a public database so that all levels of government can glean information from it.

The Governors’ advocacy was rewarded with \$5 million in the FY23 Consolidated Appropriations Act for implementing the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act and working towards the creation of a common federal data platform that can be accessed by the public.



## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Western Governors have long supported career and technical education and apprenticeship programs to expand options for students and job seekers. Over the past year, a growing recognition of the importance of integrating education and training was evident in programs and priorities at the federal level.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had widespread effects on the labor market in the United States, including periods of record-high unemployment and higher-than-average turnover across occupations. The pandemic also accelerated workplace trends such as increasing automation and the growth of remote work.

Western Governors have worked diligently to establish education and training models that enable people of all ages to advance their skills and find fulfilling, well-paying jobs, and ensure that businesses have access to the skilled employees they need to thrive.



**Michael Smith, CEO of AmeriCorps, spoke with the Governors at WGA's 2023 Annual Meeting about ways that states can partner with the program to help address workforce shortages, especially in health care and education.**

“Western Governors recognize that there are many pathways that students can take to a successful career, including short-term education and skills training or work-based learning programs such as registered apprenticeships,” WGA’s policy resolution, Workforce Development in the Western United States, reads. “Western Governors call for enhanced federal investments and more state flexibility to transform the career

services and skills development system.”

As a result of the Governors’ continued advocacy, these policies were reflected in the FY23 Consolidated Appropriations Act and other regulatory reforms.

### Career and Technical Education

Western Governors have called for stronger linkages between K-12 and

higher education, as well as enhanced federal investments targeting youth during the transition from high school to the workforce. In 2023, two programs were funded to help states tackle these issues.

The FY23 Consolidated Appropriations Act provided funds for the U.S. Department of Education’s new Career-Connected High Schools Initiative, which will foster program alignment between K-12, higher education, and workforce systems. The bill also expanded the Career Pathways for Youth Program, which helps national

out-of-school time organizations that serve youth and teens to provide age-appropriate workforce readiness programming.

### Registered Apprenticeships

The FY23 Consolidated Appropriations Act also provided \$285 million for Registered Apprenticeships, an increase of \$50 million compared to FY22.

This funding, combined with the U.S. Department of Labor’s (DOL) rescission of the 2020 regulation that established Industry-Recognized

Apprenticeship Programs (IRAPs), “will expand and scale apprenticeship opportunities while maintaining quality for participants and minimizing duplication of efforts at the federal, state, and local level,” as Governors noted in comments on the rulemaking.

“Western Governors support rescission of the IRAP rule and urge Congress and DOL to instead increase line-item formula funding for state apprenticeship programs and provide states with technical assistance to strengthen partnerships between workforce and apprenticeship entities.”



## RECREATION

Outdoor recreation is a key economic component for every state in the region. As the use of public lands intensifies, Western Governors strongly advocated for the federal government to amplify maintenance and conservation efforts.

In correspondence with members of Congress, Western Governors called for the extension of the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund – as authorized by the Great American Outdoors Act – beyond 2025.

The Governors also urged Congress to appropriately fund federal land management agencies to provide for the routine maintenance and operation costs of important visitor infrastructure and to find innovative ways to attract private investment for improving, modernizing, and expanding visitor facilities.

In addition, the Governors urged DOI to expand visitor facilities, create new visitor destinations, use technology and real-time data sharing to address overcrowding issues, and explore the expanded use of public transit, shuttles, bicycles, and e-bike rentals to decrease vehicle congestion while maintaining visitor access.



Panelists from the City of Montrose, Mountain Racing Products, and Utah State University discussed the opportunity to use outdoor recreation to boost local economies at the WGA 2023 Annual Meeting in Boulder, Colorado.

Many of these positions were reflected in the FY23 NDAA and the FY23 Consolidated Appropriations Act.

### Recreation Areas

The FY23 NDAA directed USACE to promote and enhance the development and recreational opportunities at lakes under their jurisdiction and requires that the Corps submit a report on the investments needed, including a list of deferred maintenance projects and a funding plan for listed projects.

The FY23 NDAA also directed the Secretary of Defense to develop a report for Congress on the “Economic

Valuation of Preservation of Open Space, Recreational Areas, and Habitat Associated with Project Lands” and to review existing policies for the valuation of preserving open space, recreational areas, and habitat as part of a water resources development project.

### Economic Development

The FY23 Consolidated Appropriations Act encouraged EDA to consider projects that support outdoor recreation when consistent with a region’s Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.





# RESOLUTIONS

Western Governors formally approved ten policy resolutions in FY23. The resolutions represent the Governors' collective policy on a broad range of issues affecting the region.

## **WGA Policy Resolution 2023-01 Working Lands, Working Communities**

The resolution recognizes the complex relationship between western communities and the landscapes that sustain them. Our lands offer economic opportunity and ecological benefits, and contribute to the high quality of life in western states and territories. The resolution notes the importance of collaboration between western communities and state, territorial, local, tribal and federal land and resource management entities, and the role that communities play in successful land planning and management processes. It makes several recommendations to improve collaborative endeavors, promote cross-boundary management, and enhance community capacity to address the many challenges facing our working lands.

## **WGA Policy Resolution 2023-02 States' Share of Royalties and Leasing Revenues from Federal Lands and Minerals**

The federal government has codified several historic agreements and programs to compensate western states for reduced revenue associated with the presence of tax-exempt federal lands within their borders. Western Governors call upon the federal government to honor its statutory obligations to share royalty and

lease payments with states and counties. States, as recipients of revenues from these programs and agreements, should be provided meaningful and substantial opportunities for consultation in the development of federal policy affecting those revenues.

## **WGA Policy Resolution 2023-03 Tax-Exempt Federal Lands and Secure Rural Schools**

The federal government must honor its historic agreement with states and counties in the West to compensate them for the presence of tax-exempt federal lands within their borders. Predictable and full payments under the PILT and the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) programs are vital to the provision of state and county public goods and services, such as roads, emergency response, and wildlife and natural resources protection. Western Governors support legislative efforts to improve the predictability and reliability of PILT payments and ensure forest counties receive stable SRS payments.

## **WGA Policy Resolution 2023-04 Housing is Foundational to the Success of the West**

Due to rapid population growth and housing shortages, housing is a significant challenge in urban, suburban, and rural areas across the West. This resolution highlights

Western Governors' policy related to the availability and affordability of housing in western states and territories. While many of the policies and programs affecting housing are within the jurisdiction of local governments, a variety of federal programs influence housing markets and housing development. In the resolution, the Governors recommend actions to improve federal housing programs and resources so that they function more effectively for western states and territories.

## **Policy Resolution 2023-05 Western Agriculture**

Western Governors support an array of funding, trade, education, research, and workforce development programs that promote agricultural contributions to the economies and quality of life in western states. Extended drought, changes in climate, and other factors have had significant effects on agricultural practices throughout the West. The Governors, in this resolution, provide policy recommendations to support and strengthen the health and prosperity of western agricultural communities and their economies.

### Policy Resolution 2023-06 Rural Development

Healthy, vibrant, and prosperous rural communities are critical to western states. Rural communities, however, face a variety of challenges with respect to economic development, infrastructure, and quality of life. This resolution details policies and recommendations to strengthen rural communities and businesses and ensure that programs delivering state and federal resources are efficient and accessible.

### Policy Resolution 2023-07 Broadband Connectivity

In this resolution, Western Governors highlight the importance of high-speed internet (broadband) for communities across the West. The Governors discuss common infrastructure challenges – vast distances, unforgiving terrain, and multi-jurisdictional permitting – that complicate broadband deployment projects in western states and territories. Their recommendations address new federal broadband investments and programs, data and mapping, digital equity, and strategies to help connect rural and tribal communities.

### Policy Resolution 2023-08, Veterans

The Department of Veterans Affairs and other federal agencies offer many programs and services for veterans who struggle with complex challenges after their service, including higher unemployment rates, homelessness, food insecurity, physical and psychological wounds, and bureaucratic barriers. This resolution highlights Western Governors' policy related to veterans' issues and strategies for improving federal programs. Their recommendations address collaboration between federal and state governments, capacity and staffing needs, claims processes, and access to and awareness of critical services.

### Policy Resolution 2023-09 Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons

American Indian and Alaska Native people, particularly women, are disproportionately likely to experience violence, be murdered, or go missing. This resolution highlights Western Governors' policy to address this crisis. While many of these policies and programs are

primarily within the jurisdiction of state and tribal governments, a variety of federal policies influence the resources available to tribes and states. In the resolution, Western Governors recommend actions to expand law enforcement capacity, shore up survivor support systems, and improve collaboration and coordination at all levels of government.

### Policy Resolution 2023-10 Infrastructure Permitting

A clear, consistent, focused, and effective environmental review process is essential to protect environmental resources, ensure public participation, and facilitate timely decision making in the design, financing, and execution of critical infrastructure and land management projects. These review processes can be improved and streamlined while still providing meaningful opportunities for public input and promoting a safe and healthy environment for our citizens. This resolution makes several recommendations for Congress and the Administration to consider as they continue evaluating permitting processes. These include prioritizing the hiring of qualified permitting staff in agency field offices, streamlining review processes for similar projects delivering an environmental or conservation outcome, and making processes more accessible to underserved or historically disadvantaged communities, including small and rural communities. The resolution also emphasizes that federal permitting policies and efforts to streamline permitting processes should be flexible enough to meet the diverse needs of local communities and that federal efforts should increase transparency, accessibility, and agency accountability for all projects.





# MEETINGS AND OUTREACH

During the past year, Western Governors convened regional policymakers and thought leaders, including several Cabinet Secretaries, to address critical issues facing the West. WGA meetings feature in-depth policy conversations and promote the development of collaborative relationships.

## 2023 ANNUAL MEETING

June 26-28, 2023

The 2023 Annual Meeting, hosted by Colorado Governor Jared Polis at the legendary Boulder Theater, featured six Western Governors in public policy discussions with senior administration officials, national thought leaders, and industry experts.

As WGA Chair, Governor Jared Polis opened the 2023 Annual Meeting by thanking his fellow Governors for participating in these discussions and emphasized the importance of bipartisan collaboration as the nation navigates multiple crises.

“We’re going to have really vibrant discussions about the economic drivers of the West, about how we can come together, Republicans and Democrats, around what’s important

for our states and show the nation that we work together,” Governor Polis said. “Whether it’s wildfires or water, the cooperation between the federal and state governments is more important than ever before.”

EPA Administrator Michael Regan, the first keynote speaker of the three-day meeting, echoed this sentiment.

“I’ve had the pleasure of traveling all across this great country, visiting towns and cities, both large and small,” he said. “And there’s one thing that’s been clear to me since day one, and that is state-level collaboration and

partnership are necessary if we’re going to reach and achieve our goals.”

The Governors also had productive discussions about the future of artificial intelligence, the potential for geothermal energy (which is further detailed in the special report of Governor Polis’ WGA Char initiative, *The Heat Beneath Our Feet*), as well as the power of blockchain technology to democratize investment opportunities, the economic importance of outdoor recreation, strategies for improving rural health care, expanding workforce development programs, and engaging the next generation of western leaders.



## 2022 WINTER MEETING

December 6-7, 2022



Six Western Governors attended WGA's 2023 Annual Meeting in Boulder, Colorado. From left: Governor Josh Green (Hawai'i); Governor Jared Polis (Colorado); Governor Mark Gordon (Wyoming); Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham (New Mexico); Governor Brad Little (Idaho); Governor Joe Lombardo (Nevada).

### PARTICIPATING GOVERNORS

Governor Polis was joined by WGA's then Vice Chair, Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon; Hawai'i Governor Dr. Josh Green, Idaho Governor Brad Little, Nevada Governor Joe Lombardo, and New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham.

### SPECIAL GUESTS

The Governors hosted roundtable discussions with EPA Administrator Michael Regan; Deputy Secretary of Energy David Turk; Robert Bonnie, Under Secretary of Agriculture; Richard Spinrad, Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and Administrator of NOAA; Everette Joseph, Director of the National Center for Atmospheric Research; Ashley Llorens, a Vice President and Distinguished Scientist at Microsoft; Jenny Johnson, President and CEO of Franklin Templeton; Kirsten Lynch, CEO of Vail Resorts; with Michael Smith, CEO of AmeriCorps.

### RESOLUTIONS

Western Governors approved six policy resolutions at the 2023 Annual Meeting:

- WGA Policy Resolution 2023-05, Western Agriculture
- WGA Policy Resolution 2023-06, Rural Development
- WGA Policy Resolution 2023-07, Broadband Connectivity
- WGA Policy Resolution 2023-08, Veterans
- WGA Policy Resolution 2023-09, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons
- WGA Policy Resolution 2023-10, Infrastructure Permitting

In his opening statement, Colorado Governor Jared Polis spoke about some of the Association's ongoing work, including his Chair initiative, The Heat Beneath Our Feet, and thanked all in attendance for their active participation to address some of the most critical issues facing the region during the two-day meeting.

"We're going to use the next couple of days to discuss issues, seek practical common-sense solutions, in a non-partisan way, to move the West forward and move the nation forward," he said. "We in the West continue to be successful with your help and working together... thank you all for being here and empowering this important work."

### PARTICIPATING GOVERNORS

Governor Polis was joined by Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon; Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt; Utah Governor Spencer Cox; and now former Governor Kate Brown of Oregon.

### SPECIAL GUESTS

The Governors hosted roundtable discussions with Interior Secretary Deb Haaland; Mitch Landrieu, White House Senior Advisor and Infrastructure Coordinator; and John D. Leshy, an emeritus professor at the University of California Hastings College of Law who served as DOI solicitor from 1993 to 2001 and is the author of *Our Common Ground: A History of America's Public Lands*.

### RESOLUTIONS

Western Governors approved three new policy resolutions at the 2022 Winter Meeting:

- WGA Policy Resolution 2023-02, States' Share of Royalties and Leasing Revenues from Federal Lands and Minerals
- WGA Policy Resolution 2023-03, Tax-Exempt Federal Lands and Secure Rural Schools
- WGA Policy Resolution 2023-04, Housing is Foundational to the Success of the West



Five Western Governors attended WGA's 2022 Winter Meeting in Phoenix, Arizona. From left: Governor Mark Gordon (Wyoming); Governor Spencer Cox (Utah); Former Governor Kate Brown (Oregon); Governor Jared Polis (Colorado); and former Governor Kevin Stitt (Oklahoma).



# 2022 ANNUAL MEETING

July 26-28, 2022

Whether it was wildfire mitigation and restoration, mental and behavioral health care, or cybersecurity and the supply chain, bipartisanship and a willingness to work across state lines was the theme that permeated nearly every conversation at WGA's 2022 Annual Meeting in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

"Effective partnerships and collaboration... are indicative of how we work to resolve problems in the West," Idaho Governor Brad Little, the host of last year's Annual Meeting, said in his opening statement. "Today, we're seeing the evidence of the incredible progress we're making of getting more work done on the ground level."

Western Governors also released the special report for Governor Little's Chair initiative, Working Lands, Working Communities, which contains targeted recommendations on issues that affect natural resource management and the role that local communities play in successful land planning and management processes.

## PARTICIPATING GOVERNORS:

Governor Little was joined by Colorado Governor Jared Polis; Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon; Montana Governor Greg Gianforte; North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum; Utah Governor Spencer Cox; and now former Governors Doug Ducey of Arizona and David Ige of Hawaii.

## SPECIAL GUESTS:

The Governors hosted roundtable discussions with Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack; Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg; Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra; and Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough.

## RESOLUTIONS

The Western Governors approved one new policy resolution at the 2022 Annual Meeting:

- WGA Policy Resolution 2023-01, Working Lands, Working Communities



Eight Western Governors attended WGA's 2022 Annual Meeting in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. From left: Governor Doug Burgum (North Dakota); Governor Spencer Cox (Utah); Governor Jared Polis (Colorado); Jim Ogsbury, the former Executive Director of WGA; Governor Mark Gordon (Wyoming); Governor Brad Little (Idaho); former Governor David Ige (Hawai'i); Governor Greg Gianforte (Montana); former Governor Doug Ducey (Arizona).

## Cabinet Secretary Breakfast

Each winter, WGA hosts a breakfast with Cabinet Secretaries in Washington D.C. This year, the breakfast was attended by 12 of our Western Governors and 4 Cabinet Secretaries: Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Marcia Fudge, and Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough.

WGA staff had conversations with several federal agency Chief Data Officers to discuss better integration of state data into federal decision-making activities, as well as Kristen Avery, the White House Director for Drought and Western Resilience at the Council on Environmental Quality, and Yvanna Cancela, the new Governors' liaison at the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs.

The Western Governors' Task Force on Collaborative Conservation met with agency officials at DOI for a seven-hour session on state and federal efforts to conserve the greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat in western states.



Twelve Western Governors attended WGA's Annual Cabinet Breakfast in Washington, D.C., this year. From left: Jack Waldorf, WGA's Executive Director; Governor Brad Little (Idaho); Governor Kevin Stitt (Oklahoma); Governor Greg Gianforte (Montana); Governor Spencer Cox (Utah); Governor Jared Polis (Colorado); Governor Mark Gordon (Wyoming); Governor Tina Kotek (Oregon); Governor Josh Green (Hawai'i); Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham (New Mexico); and Governor Doug Burgum (North Dakota).

## Media Coverage

WGA continued to earn significant media exposure thanks to its important bipartisan policy work. Over the last year, the Western Governors' Association and its policy work were mentioned in 1,500 articles. Topics included WGA's work on geothermal energy via The Heat Beneath Our Feet initiative, the Western Prosperity Roundtable Forum, affordable housing, mental health, endangered species, wildfire, and much more.

## Podcasts

WGA published three episodes of its *Out West* podcast in FY23 – “The Next Generation of Western Leaders,” “The Well of the Future: Repurposing Oil and Gas Wells for Geothermal Energy Production,” and “Meet the Winners of the 2022 Celebrate the West Regional Art Competition” – which resulted in 1,400 downloads. Check out the full *Out West* archive on Apple podcasts or Spotify.

## Video

Video content from the 2023 Western Prosperity Roundtable Forum and the Heat Beneath Our Feet initiative webinar series was viewed 5,400 times for a total of 700 hours this year.

## Website and Social Media

With rich content produced in connection with Governor Jared Polis' WGA Chair initiative, The Heat Beneath Our Feet, traffic on WGA's website rose five percent in FY23. That same content drove a significant increase in followers and engagements on WGA's Twitter account, as well as its LinkedIn and Facebook pages.



Colorado Governor Jared Polis welcomes Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon to his tenure as Chair of the Western Governors' Association.

## LOOKING AHEAD

At the conclusion of WGA's 2023 Annual Meeting, Colorado Governor Jared Polis officially handed the reins as Chair of the Western Governors' Association to Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon. The Governors also elected New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham as the Association's new Vice Chair.



New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham is the new WGA Vice Chair.

For his Chair initiative, Governor Gordon will examine how to accelerate carbon capture, utilization, and storage (CCUS) technologies in an effort to decarbonize the West. The yearlong initiative will evaluate how CCUS technologies, including direct air capture, can position western states at the forefront of emerging carbon markets and reduce the effects of carbon emissions on the environment.

“We know that simply curbing emissions alone is not going to solve the climate crisis we have,” Governor Gordon said. “We have to be aggressive, and we have to use what America has always done well, which is innovation and opportunity to figure ways to aggressively affect a difference in our atmosphere... working together with all of the great western states, we will decarbonize the West.”

Immediately following the announcement of Governor Gordon's initiative, he signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Colorado Governor Jared Polis pledging to work together to advance the capabilities of direct air capture in their respective states.

An update of Governor Gordon's initiative will be provided at WGA's 2023 Winter Meeting in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, on November 6-8. Initiative findings will be memorialized in an initiative report to be released in conjunction with WGA's 2024 Annual Meeting.

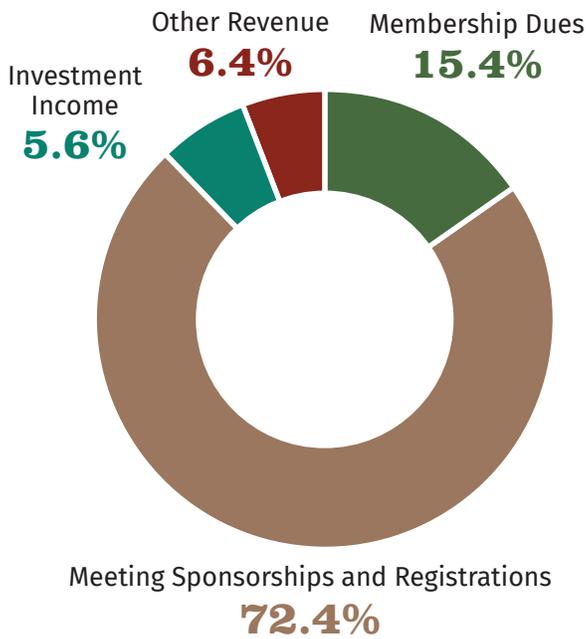


# FINANCES

WGA income is derived from Western Governors’ annual dues, sponsor contributions, meeting registration fees, investment income, and other sources. WGA’s net income totaled \$332,147 for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2023. The figures presented below are unaudited and an independent CPA firm has not yet expressed an opinion on them.

## Revenues

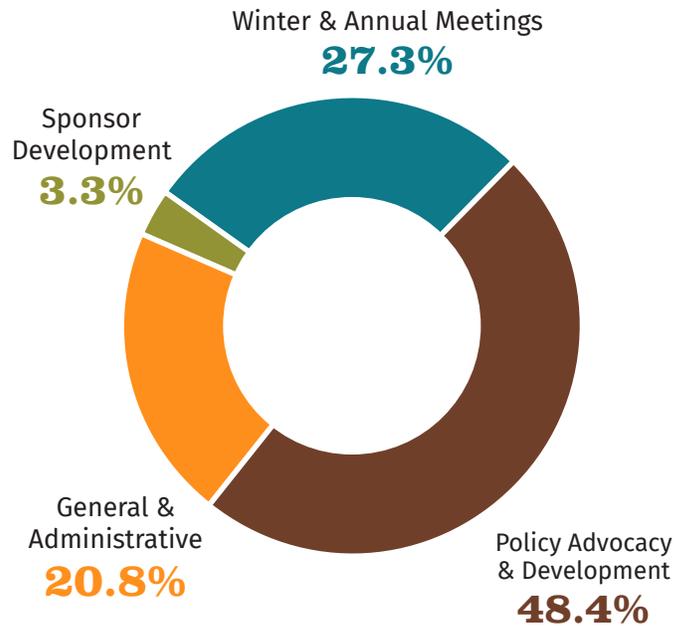
July 1, 2022—June 30, 2023



|  |                    |
|--|--------------------|
| Membership Dues                        | \$686,400          |
| Meeting Sponsorships and Registrations | \$3,211,925        |
| Investment Income                      | \$251,553          |
| Other Revenue                          | \$285,000          |
| <b>Total</b>                           | <b>\$4,434,878</b> |

## Expenses

July 1, 2022—June 30, 2023



|                                 |                    |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| Policy Advocacy and Development | \$1,988,092        |
| General & Administrative        | \$852,040          |
| Sponsor Development             | \$138,506          |
| Winter & Annual Meetings        | \$1,124,093        |
| <b>Total</b>                    | <b>\$4,102,731</b> |

**Net Income: \$332,147**

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WGA Chair

**Governor Mark Gordon**  
Wyoming  
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**Lauren DeNinno**  
Deputy Policy Advisor

**Kevin Doran**  
Senior Policy Director

**Steven Emmen**  
Policy Advisor

**Carrie Hirsch**  
Administrative Assistant

**Amanda Nelson**  
Meeting Planner

**Amy Haberthier**  
Senior Accountant

**Zach Nowak**  
Policy Advisor

**Sarah Olsen**  
Director of Development

**Abby Pelsmaeker**  
Policy Associate

**Jonah Seifer**  
Policy Advisor

**Jack Spina**  
Communications Director

**Anna Thielen**  
Foundation Manager

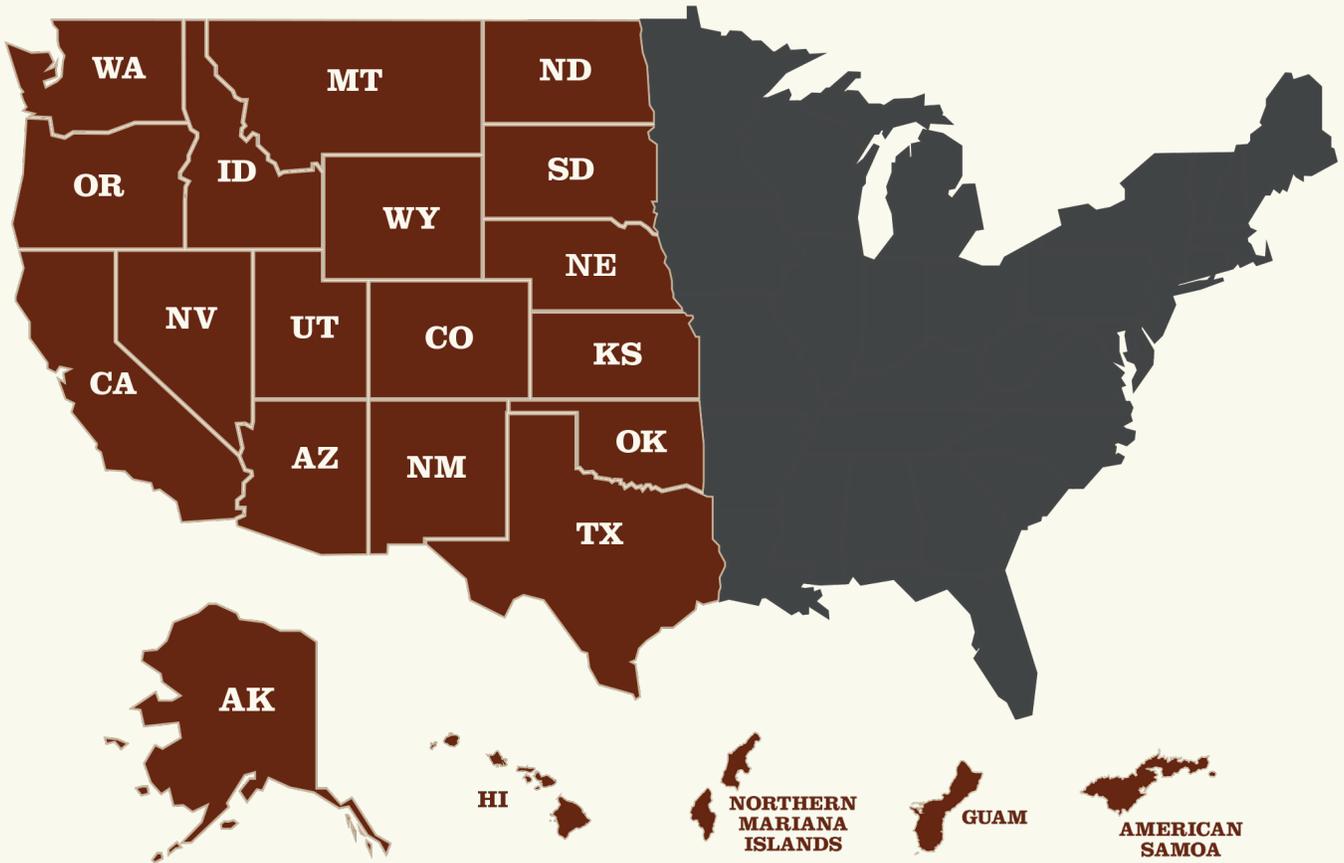
**Troy Timmons**  
Policy Director

**Toni Vigil**  
Office Manager,  
Executive Assistant

**Jack Waldorf**  
Executive Director

**Chennou Xiong**  
Policy Associate

# The Western Governors' Association Region



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